

DANTE ALIGHIERI
THE FESTAL DAY,
MAY 1865 BY JAMES
LOCKHART, M.A

James Lockhart

DANTE ALIGHIERI

THE FESTAL

LAY OF THE

ITALY

BY J. S. BOURG VENERAND



DANTE ALIGHIERI

THE FESTAL DAY

MAY MDCCCLXV

ITALIA.



AMANS CONCORS VENERANS

BY JAMES LOCKHART, M. A.,

OF THE UNIVERSITIES OF OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE.



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It is ever the solemn and grateful duty of posterity to honour the memory of benefactors who have largely contributed to the general advancement and welfare of man.

When such achievements, ever seeming more useful and astonishing, have, in comparatively remote and dark periods, been the triumph of marvellous genius, under the pressure of no ordinary political and social difficulty, harassing alike body and spirit, — we are impelled to offer the tribute

of spontaneous and unceasing homage at the shrine of such grandeur.

This veneration is the office of all nations. There is no separation of man in such holiness. There is no schism in such religion, which is, as it were, a spiritual manifestation to the human race.

The author of this poem, consecrated to the illustrious name of DANTE, presumes to range himself under this blessed banner of *National Alliance*, but with reverence and humbleness he offers the tribute at the Altar of the Festival.

They who have meditated in the garden of the Poet Philosopher will, it is trusted, perceive the tendency of the graver thoughts as meant to harmonize with the design of the *Master*. The lighter proportions are drawn after some of the livelier images of that *Teacher*, which, however, are never wholly disassociated from a solemn sentiment. Much other and weightier matter might have been introduced, but the object has been to endeavour to measure the subject according to a

standard which might rather be characteristic of a Festival than of stern argument. Such as the offering is, it is presented to friends, and to those whom the writer would fain call so, although personally unknown to him, in the hope that both will do him the honour to believe the work has not been lightly attempted, nor without much self-diffidence; but, nevertheless, with a loving earnestness in proportion to the vastness of the subject.

J. L.

FLORENCE, *May*, 1865.

How charming is divine philosophy!
Not harsh, and crabbed, as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Othello's lute,
And a perpetual feast of nectar'd sweets,
Where no crnde surfeit reigns.

MILTON.

DANTE ALIGHIERI

THE FESTAL DAY.

I.

THIS Sphere of ours obedient to the Hand
That wondrous made, harmonious in each part,
The Great Jehovah Spirit blessed with light —
First gracious gift, all pure, all bright, all glorious —
Teaching the eye to move the immortal soul
To wisdom, by the various form and colour
Of His fair work, when God saw all was good.
Too soon, alas! tho' godlike man was blest,
And free to choose, the dark, the proud, the haught
Rebellious soul would dwell with gloom and night,
While Day with a glad vesture, grand, serene
And sanctified, bade welcome to the view

Of holiness and order blessing all
Creation. Oft the gracious Messenger,
Where all is Light, went from the Highest Throne,
And spake unheeded, grieving to return
With muffled wing, and the sad record bear
Of blindness. So some perished, but not all
Were thus perverse. The Angel watched the sense
Where wisdom sits, impassive if not stirred
By man's freewill, and prayer to comfort Will.
Who communed right with self, and prayed for help,
Were heard: then joyous heavenward sped the Voice —
'Some have believed, and grace received with love.'

Hiss, thou dark Serpent-fiend, in tangled brake,
Coil thy huge length of horror in disport,
Where mortal hand casts the germ-corn of life
In space subdued; a heel is crushing there
Thy head of sin. Each step that lifts the weight
Of man dressing the land, falls fiercer on,
And curse more deadly smites thy puffed up frame,
Till thou, vile reptile, writhe within the tomb
Of the deep harvest furrow. If thy sting
In Paradise hath pierced, in Paradise
The gentle balm of promised life was poured.

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The flaming sword of Cherubim aye waves
To keep the way of life ; but, tho' that path
Be kept, the bright sword-flame turns every way,
And shows the outward land of thorns, and prompts
Man to beware, lest he should kick the pricks:
But flashes fierce the glittering fiery-brand,
Warning that light shall bring less saving help
If the task-work begin not with the dawn.

Yea, there be thorns and thistles nigh the soul
To heed, a threatening plague to purge with fire.
Sweet herbs arise where the rank weed is burnt,
Whose ashes fructify the balmy store :
Ashes! befitting signs of humble grief.
In that new Eden ground another Eve,
Without offence, perchance, may taste the fruit
Of some fair Tree, and all her sons be wise,
With knowledge hating wrong, and seeking good.
Then shall the tree of life be seen, and all
Discern perennial bloom, then may approach
And gather Branches that shall ever bud,
Then Paradise again may here be found,
Death earlier doomed, and man to Seraph raised.
Then shall the strife with Heaven of sinful men

Be stayed. But n'er have these been smit, as they
Of hideous growth, hurled by the heathen Zeus
'Neath Tartarus dread, mock-sons of Earth and Heaven;
Kronos, and Crius, and Iapetus;
Or slain by some heroic Demigod,
For rebel force thus doomed — Porphyryon huge,
And grim Aleyoneus, horrors of strength;
Gods and their Race ungodly, brutal all.
Our God is merciful, long-suffering, just,
Giver of wisdom to His sons, and grace.
No monster-forms, no one-eyed shapes affright,
No hundred-handed gaolers now torment;
Save where an ancient leprosy uncared
Gnaws in the brain, and blinds the ignoble crew.

But there be mighty men of giant minds,
Captains and Chieftains, Pioneers of good,
Teaching their Brave to labour and advance,
And battle with the coward whine of "*Halt.*"
These can discern the fair Elysian Lawn,
These ever lead the march, bridging the flood
With polished cedars, wrought within the maze
Of wilderness that clouds the sight of fools:
No halting theirs! — 'The Border-land is nigh;

Yon belt of thicket must be passed, heed then
Within the brake no ambushed foe surprise ;
Palms and the balmy breath of spicy groves
Fan 'at the threshold of the Holy Gate ;
There, pluck the Victor's branch, and robe in white :
Soon shall ye hear the solemn psalmody,
Soon bidden to the Feast shall join in psalm.'

Now hath the dove with olive-branch flit home,
And whelming flood no more shall veil the Earth
From hope. The sportive beam hath kissed the wrath
Of waters, and all-joyous light inwreathed
Hath garlanded the convened Token.
In famed Hesperia-land, the rainy Bow,
With brighter name, bosoms the *Lightning-flash*,
As if once man thought Jove hurled circling bolts,
And hit the fluttering target of the air,
Omen of Earth unscathed and promised peace,
Bright *Arcobaleno* of suspended wrath.
Mayhap, the legend taught, Apollo dipped
His arrows in the Sun, and sped the shafts,
In laughing mood, to dazzle in an arch ;
Or set in fancy-wreath sparks from his crown,
Or light prismatic fringed around his bow,

A meteor—herald decked for holiday.
Mayhap, thus fair Ausonia, in the eld,
When Saturn ruled dispensing equal law, —
Named, in rich Uskan speech, the BOW OF HEAVEN,
Translated, ere the language passed away,
By some word—painter into other tongue,
And *this*, some after ages past, perchance,
From Race to Race transmitted as their Stgn,
Was fashioned to new garment, but the woof
The same, till, ere Dantean time, a Seer
Caught up the spirit of the Pagan word, .
And set again with divination free,
Transfused harmonious into mythic song:
When ages then had run their ordered course,
And Christians sought to gather from each stream
The floating leaves that charmed the practised eye,
Some, rare exotic, graceful in the form,
Or finer wove, for garlanding in one,
The artist wisely gathering nearer each,
In novel pattern grouped with taste refined,
Or wider set, thus statelier, on the stem,
So that the new and old should best unite.
Thus word with word, as leaf with leaf, combined,
Tufted in fair array to deck the chiefs

Who trace their glory with their own bright pen,
And ARCOBALENO formed the Lightning-Bow.
Be this a word-for-ever, and unchanged;
Be *Arcobaleno* thine, Italia, thine,
Symbol of hope, untouched by barbarous hand,
Sweet harbinger of peace flashed down from heaven,
Hope ever steadfast, glorious to behold.

Yea, Men of Italy, *ye* have believed
In the fair Token dearest to the heart;
Arise, behold the halo round her head;
Throned in all grace of majesty and truth,
She comes — YOUR OWN TRUE HOPE, the Maiden of your love:
Who can pencil, who that bright image mould,
That charm of simple meekness fix in word,
The look and gesture, radiance of mind?
Hope hath no thought of wrong, can have no guile,
No falsity perverse, for that were lie,
And lie distorts the wisdom that should guide,
Casts blindness and confusion round the soul,
And fiendish baseness. Hope confides in good.
Her radiance comes from Heaven, and is so bright
That Vice unmasked falls down before abashed.

O loved Italia, thou canst gaze on Hope;
 Raise thy bright youthful eye, nor shade the light.
 Behold, she beckons on *Drey-Herren-Spitz*:⁽¹⁾
 'There, take the Stelvio path; there, Tarvis Alp —
 Straight to Vienna!.... Lo, the MOURNING LAND —
Venetia! — lifting hand and voice in prayer.
 God's will be done.... in peace, but tears and bonds
 Have driven men, of hearts less brave, to war.
 Ay Venice in her palmy days did help
 Ravenna weeping, — of your Italy.
 Good men remember kindness, and repay.' —
 Anon, on Apennine, "*Gran Sasso*," named,
 "*D' Italia*," high on *Monte Corno* Peak,
 Waving toward S^t. Peter's Patrimony,
 She spake as one that felt some glowing truth, —
 'Behold, ye Men; salute your Promise-Land:
 Peace! peace! to that first Pope; for he lived poor,
 Whom Christ rebuk'd for smiting with the sword.' —

 Then paused; —

A Glory round about her shone.
 Forth from a Cloud fringed with a jasper Light,
 Dependent to the Mount a Scroll came down,
 Wreathed with an incense-vapour as from Heaven.

Straightway upon her finger fell a Ray,
And guiding pencilled as with fire — JEHOVAH.
REDEMPTION . WISDOM . TRUTH . HUMILITY .
ZEAL . JUSTICE . PEACE . PRAYER . LABOUR . PATIENCE . JOY .

.

Now Hope's green Branch with ripening fruit bends low; —
Too oft, alas! blight seared the verdant leaves,
But n'er the Tree lost sap, nor whetted axe
Destroyed, tho' cutting deep; for brave were they
Who met the foe. Some perished to defend,
Unvanquished, save by death: but o'er their graves
Bright flowerets bloomed, for Hope stood watchful nigh.
Some watered the ag'd roots in the drear night,
Hiding in caverned labyrinths by day,
Knowing that God would give the increase. Some, thrust
Unjustly forth by a wild people's will,
In exile died, and found an honoured tomb:
Hope bare them up awhile, for Hope was just,
And deemed that Time a comforter should be,
And touch the oppressor with a sense of wrong.
Repentance came; they sorrow'd, but not saved.
Ay me! For ONE the crown shrunk on the tomb,
Whose laurel should have budded for the head.

II.

Who is *she* all vision-rapt, and as in fairy dream,
By tree of tallest laurel couched, and a crystal fountain stream:
Who is she thus laid in trance, and murmuring in her sleep
Of one new-born by the verdant banks of waters welling deep,
Where laurel berry dropping ripe, upon a grassy mead,
And gushing fount give meat to babe for the coming giant deed? — ⁽²⁾
She is the Mother watchful there of that prophetic son,
Who taught his loved Italia all the victories to be won,
The union that unites the brave, the true philosophy,
That Kings who rule the people right, rule over people free,
That Pastors of the Christian flock, who humbly hope to save,
To Caesar give the tribute due, to God the lambs God gave.
The Laurel tall shall greeted be, and greater its renown,
The Fountain higher leap in light, and flash in rainbow down.

That Seer shall tell in rhythm-myth of horrors seen below,
And tortured souls intralled of sin, made pure by fiery woe.
He to the spirits bless'd shall rise, caught up to highest Heaven,
Ecstatic hymn on Earth with lyre the saintly records given. —
Where shall that Prophet touch the chord of his celestial lyre,
And by what name shall he be called, who caught from Heaven the fire?
Italia, lift thy voice, proclaim — He touched the chord for thee;
Italia, lift thy voice, and name the Prophet that shall be.
Bind round thy classic garment—hem the talismanic name,
Then proudly walk throughout the world with DANTE's hallow'd fame.

FIorentia, thou bright name, but brighter now
For salutation, and every flower more bright
Of thine; Fiorentia, now more quently throned
And fair, posied thy paths, embroidered—all
With cabalistic charm round thy phylacteries —
Arise, rejoice, this is THE DAY OF FEAST,
Sacred to *him* with reverence and love.
This day be thine, bless'd with a Mother's joy,
This day be ours, Memorial of his birth: —
Thou didst baptize, thou heard'st the cradle rock.

Sprightly anon, or pensive as he lay,
The babe seemed pondering on some early fate,
Some cross that soon might trip the playful step,
Or would he cast the swathing fetters far,
And laugh as if the prank had set him free.
And so God gave him strength and intellect,
And soon he knew the blessing of the gift.
Then went he forth a stripling in thy streets,
Or culled abroad the lily of thy vales,
Or laved in rippling Arno. *Well* he loved —
With all his gentle soul — thy home, thy air,
Thy people. If one sigh was softly breathed,
'Twas one that worshipp'd; one that shrined a name
On the lip's threshold, caught as if the fane
Of his young heart should lose the whispering voice.
Now would he gaze in vision, now would dream,
Now, fair Fiorentia, would he love thee more
For being fair. Could *one* be lovelier nigh?
Oh! how Love ruled the *Banquet of the Heart*; ^(a)
Oh! fearful dream! while Love stood smiling by.
And that dear name, that hidden name! whose charm
Held him in such mysterious thrall, shall none
Divine? Ah! why the riddle? Knew *he* why —
He only, *he* who veiled its beauty first,

And masked his passion in the first sweet song? ⁽¹⁶⁾
Dear NAME, bright, beautiful, serene and bless'd,
That didst bewitch on earth himself and all,
Drawing him up from worldliness to grace —
Thyself still soaring to bright Spheres and Heaven —
We hail thee, BEATRICE, we thee invoke;
Be thou, be DANTE, omen of all good.

THE SUN had robed nine balmy Springs in light, ⁽⁵⁾
Since Christian Cross first signed the graceful child,
And Dante gazed on that life-giving Star,
In joyous boyhood, with supreme delight,
And meditated what might be the source.
Oft so, in after manhood, would he scan
The glorious order of revolving Spheres;
And oft, as in the days of infancy,
The vision of his trembling Beatrice
Would haunt in dream, Love smiling as before.
She was his light, the Star that held his fate. —
Eight times Earth's Planet circled in its orb,
Since she was sprinkled at baptismal font,
And little Beatrice the while had shone
More lovely than her star-compeers. He saw,
And worshipped for the brightness, — Passion flower
In one fair garden with the Lily set.
Then she in all the freshness of her joy
Went forth and prattled of the blithesome morn,
Of flowerets gather'd in green fields, of birds

That flit not from the brook and willow branch,
As she sang pretty songs to please and teach:
Or now, in queenly Florence tripping on,
She glanced at brilliant pictured tapestries
Spread for May-day, and flaunting sheeny flags;
Or wondered how the minstrels made sweet tunes:
Then, peradventure, some poor cripple passed,
Or halted, asking charity. Her heart
Was open, and the tear-drop gathering fell
Upon the ready purselet for the need.
Now would she greet an elder passing by,
With glad obeisance, or kiss hands and wave
To little maidens of some princely house,
Bidding 'Good-day,' or lisping 'Thousand thanks,'
In the soft language of the Si. For all,
She had a gentle sign, a word that won.
And so it chanced that graceful Dante went,
It might be wilfully, that way, and caught
A glancing ray flashed from her laughing eye:
For he had watched the glory of the orb,
And snatched the fire of inspiration once: —
'Twas but a flash, but lightning to the soul,
Intensely vivid, darting to the brain,
Throughout vibrating in each slightest pulse ⁽⁶⁾

Of life's arterial maze, — in *him* for ever! —
And *now*, 'Good morn' she bade in festive tone
Of innocence, and he went on rejoicing.
The hour was nine; the music of her voice
Seemed soft cadenza of beatitude,
Full harmony of speech, *her first to him*,
THE SALUTATION toned in each full chord, ⁽⁷⁾
Breath of majestic rhythm, and of rhyme,
Amore, ever joying in his heart,
Amore, winging up to Paradise,
Amore, hymning patriot-love on Earth. ⁽⁸⁾

So young, so innocent, so lovely, good!
Ah! Beatrice, what wonder if *he* felt,
Who ever felt all virtue of the soul;
What wonder if he wept to lose such prize —
To see thee, dear one, lost to all his hope,
Another's! while he loved! not his — for ever!
This had he borne, tho' wasting e'er in heart;
But *now*, — the soul, the mind, the very thought,
All Dante, all had perished, when *she* went, ⁽⁹⁾
Leaving on earth no like. Weeping he wept,
But weeping, thro' the tears saw hope and strength,
As visions shone of Beatrice in heaven,

...

Angelic in the choir of sweet Hosannas. ⁽¹⁰⁾
The mantle of Philosophy seemed spread
To gather round his anguish and to soothe,
To robe with graceful symmetry of fold,
And comfort to high regions of pure bliss,
Where she, the type of philosophic truth,
Transfigured with Seraphic light, should greet
Again, and with illumination teach. ⁽¹¹⁾

Then he revolved how he might grasp the torch
Blazing in brightness, and bring down to Earth,
How clothe celestial thought with lucid garb,
And sparkling words, delving in generous soil
For the rich ores that best amalgamate,
And tracing mazy veins of crusted gem
In many quarries — brilliants for new speech; ⁽¹²⁾
Mindful that ere the classic Roma shone,
Each hardy Race had grand primeval words,
And such again wrought aptly and conjoined,
Might grace the lustre of one jewell'd ring,
That wearing each, all best might know a brother,
So ever scorn barbaric gaud and gloze; —
This, Beatrice, thy gift, thy pledge of love!
His grace of language and expanse of mind.

But bramble and wild thorn beset the path,
And hideous hand of faction barred the way,
Made the road rough awhile, and brethren foes:
Yet in the lists all strove for common good,
Guelf, Ghibelin; a patriotic strife
Fermenting in the veins to form new blood:
These sought the strength that union gives to all,
Those, independence, hating stranger-bond:
Fierce was the combat, generous the cause;
Both fought to conquer liberty and right,
But slew themselves, sad punishment for sin!
Sin worshipping the Idol that would stride
Athwart the Alp in hideous majesty;
Sin worshipping the Head that gloared askance
On the rich pasture that should feed the sheep.

III.

WHAT voice, what plaint of sorrow by the shores
Of Arno? what faint chord sighs forth 'Adieu'
In concord grief; Oh! whose the breath of woe?
How bitter 'Farewell,' when it is the last! —
Ill-omened *last!* Hope veiled thee from his view,
Or *that* bright Muse had never warbled bliss.
Hark! mourns the harp with trembling note more sad,
Hark! wails the voice more bitter in the strain.

'ADIEU! my loved Fiorenza, cast me far,
To exile, yea, to death — I love thee still.
Thrust by thy hand from honours and from wealth,
From sunny hearth, mine own familiar friends,
If anger kindle into words of fire,

No smouldering wrath shall blacken in my breast.
Tho' Gueff thy children, I an honoured son
With duty revered, deeming honour most
To shield *then* from the thrust of alien craft;
If Ghibelin, of tainted blood I seem,
Most honour *now*, to free from home-turmoil.
Behold me poor, cast forth from thy embrace,
Crushed, blighted in the prime, unheard condemned,
Bearing with love the chastisement of hate,
Doomed to the scanty crumb of bitter bread ⁽¹³⁾
Doled proudly to the humbled and forlorn,
Yet joying in the hope to save thee still,
But joying most if I embrace thee saved.
Yea, yea, thou shalt be saved; yea, love me more,
Exalting thy true son in memory of his trust.
Then hung he on a willow the trist harp,
As they of old, far from beloved Zion,
And cross'd his breast, and sat him down and wept, —
'My Florence, I forgive, forgive thou me;
For thee my life! Remember in the tomb.'
Then smiting on the bosom, as resolved,
Scanning afar the barrier Apennine,
He spake the words that echoed sharp and shrill
Towards that lost home, ere the rough crags were scaled.

'Now come, Adversity, come grimly on,
More terrible, if I may better know
Myself, who thought to know in Love's assault,
Abased and stricken in that first ordeal,
Bearing the fiery trial of the heart
With humbleness of soul and gentle mind,
Rapt by the voice of Psyche winged for Heaven,
The chrysalis on Earth freed from the web
Of tangling death, mythic of saintly love,
Celestial type of brighter hope for all,
Farfalla spangled by a sunny beam,
All-sporting in primeval light, refreshed,
In the new birth beatified and pure.
Now come, Adversity, and tell me yet,
More than my loved *Farfalla* if thou canst;
I scorn thee, and do mock thy puny sting,
For Wisdom's law shall teach me to be strong
In justice, rectitude, and holy thought, "⁹⁹
And knowing these, and better thus myself,
I shall have power to bear the wrongs of man,
And show my brethren in apt words to rise
Regenerate, with nobler grace of mind,
Seeking the weal of all, nor rash nor slow,
E'er skilful in the labour of "*Advance*,"

Till each have learnt the precept of The Book,
Wise as the serpent, harmless as the dove.
Thus comforted he rose, conscious of worth
And charity. Then slaking at the stream
The thirst, onward he paced with firmer step
IMMORTAL DANTE, GLORY OF THE GREAT.

NOTES.

(¹) Drey-Herren-Spitz is the "Picco dei tre Signori" of Italian maps, and is in the range of the Rhaetic Alps.

(²) Boccaccio, in his life of Dante, relates the dream of the poet's Mother, which is partly embodied in the first six verses of this II. part.

(³) "E nell' una delle mani mi pareva che questi (Amore) tenesse una cosa, la quale ardesse tutta; e pareami che mi dicesse queste parole: *Vale cor tuum*. E quando egli era stato alquanto, pareami che disvegliasse questa (Beatrice) che dormia; e tanto si forzava per suo ingegno, che le faceva mangiare quella cosa, che in mano gli ardeva, la quale ella mangiava dubitosamente." Dante: *Vita Nova*.

(⁴) See the sonnet by Dante, beginning

"A ciascun'alma presa"
Vita Nova

(⁵) The respective ages of Dante and Beatrice, when they first saw each other, are mentioned by Boccaccio in his life of Dante Alighieri.

(⁶) Beatrice was now eight years of age, and Dante writes, "Ella parveni vestita d'un nobilissimo colore sanguigno, ciuta ed ornata alla guisa che alla sua giovanissima etade si convenia. In quel punto dico veracemente che lo spirito della vita, il quale dimora nella segretissima camera del cuore, cominciò a tremare sì fortemente, che apparìa ne' menomi polsi orribilmente." *Vita Nova*.

(⁷) Dante's words are, "Per la sua (Beatrice) ineffabile cortesia mi salutò, e virtuosamente tanto, che mi pareva allora vedere tutti i termini della beatitudine."

(⁸) Dante's description of the power of this *Amore* is thus given, "Dico che quando ella (Beatrice) apparì da parte alcuna, per la speranza della mirabile salute, (salutazione,) nullo nemico mi rimanea; anzi mi giungea una fiamma di caritate, la quale mi faceva perdonare a qualunque m'avesse offeso: e chi allora m'avesse domandato di cosa alcuna, la mia risponsione sarebbe stata solamente *Amore*, con viso vestito d'umiltà." *Vita Nova*.

Also, read the sonnet —

"Oltre la spera, che più larga gira."

where it is evident Dante attributes to the *Amore*, which Beatrice inspired, his "*Intelligenza nuova*."

Also, see-Ballata IX. of the *Canzoniere* of Dante —

"Io mi son pargoletto"

(⁹) Read Dante's sorrowful *Canzone* —

"Gli occhi dolenti per pietà del cuore."

Vita Nova.

(¹⁰) For the *Hosanna*, see the *Vita Nova*, and the *Commedia*, Purgat. XI, 41; XXIX, 50: Parad. VII, 4; VIII, 28-30; XXVIII, 94; XXXII, 134.

(¹¹) The influence of Beatrice over the Poet, in leading him to high and noble aspirations, is constantly observed in his works; see Parad. XXXI, 79.

(¹²) Consult Dante's book "*De vulgari eloquio*."

(¹³) "Tu proverai siccome sa di sale
Lo pane altrui, e come è duro calle
Lo scendere e 'l salir per l'altrui scale."
Parad. XVII, 58.

(¹⁴) Dante, "*De Monarchiâ*." Lib. primus, § XIII.



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